

ABSTRACT

Title of Thesis: THE PHYSICIST

A SCENIC DESIGN

A THEORETICAL PRODUCTION OF THE SCHOOL OF THEATRE, DANCE, AND PERFORMANCE STUDIES AT THE UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND-COLLEGE PARK. CLARICE SMITH PERFORMANCE ARTS CENTER'S THE INA & JACK KAY THEATRE.

Yunpu Hu, Master of Fine Arts, 2020

Thesis Directed By: Associate Professor, Daniel Conway,
School of Theatre, Dance, and Performance
Studies

The purpose of this thesis is to provide research, supporting paperwork, and other materials that document the scenic design process for the theoretical production of Friedrich Dürrenmatt's *The Physicist*, presented by the University of Maryland-College park, school of Theatre, Dance, and Performance Studies. This thesis contains the following: scenic research images collected to express and explore period, location, and emotional/intellectual/psychological landscapes; preliminary sketches; photographs of the 1/4" model; full drafting plates and paint elevations used to communicate the design to the technical director and paint charge; a unit list naming each scenic element; a props list and research book to detail each hand prop and furniture piece.

THE PHYSICIST

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A THEORETICAL PRODUCTION OF THE SCHOOL OF THEATRE, DANCE,
AND PERFORMANCE STUDIES AT THE UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND-
COLLEGE PARK, CLARICE SMITH PERFORMING ARTS CENTER'S THE INA
& JACK KAY THEATRE.

by

Yunpu Hu

Thesis submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of the
University of Maryland, College Park, in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Fine Arts
2020

Advisory Committee:

Associate Professor Daniel Conway, Chair

Associate Professor Helen Huang

Assistant Professor Jared Mezzocchi

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Dedication

To my parents, who have always believed in me and supported my studying in the United State.

To all TDPS faculty and MFA designers, who have helped and taught me a lot.

Acknowledgements

I wish to acknowledge the countless hours in advising, training, and encouragement by the Faculty and advisors that have shaped my education. Their wisdom, experience, passion, and time has inspired, enrich and guide me to the designer I am today.

Daniel Conway
Misha Kachman
Brian MacDevitt
Helen Huang
Jared Mezzochi

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DESIGN OVERVIEW

I used a 1/4" inch scale model to present my design to the director and my advisor (Figure 1). The whole design is a semi-circular space divided into two levels, surrounded by curving walls. The lower level is the drawing room of the sanatorium, which is occupied by three physicists. A circular staircase provides access to the hall. The upper half of the design draws on many elements from confinement room or prison to create an air corridor across the building.



Figure 1

CONCEPT STATEMENT

Friedrich Dürrenmatt's *The physicist* is a play set in the context of the Second World War and the Cold War. It describes the murders of three supposedly mentally ill physicists in a sanatorium and the subsequent stories that happen to them.

The play focuses on the ethical issues facing humanity as it significantly advances in science, especially nuclear technology. Mankind should be alert when technological achievements turned into weapons and social elites should fulfil their social responsibilities. As the plot progresses, the motives of the three physicists become clear, Johann Wilhelm Mobius feigned madness and was admitted to a sanatorium, knowing that his invention would lead to disaster. The other two physicists were investigators sent by a country or agency to steal his work. The ending of the story has a strong sense of satire and pessimism. The owner of a sanitarium saw through the plans of three physicists and finally occupied everything for herself.

As a scenic designer, I believe that the scenery should convey the original intention of the playwright and the emotion of the designer in a unique way. It should also provide more possibilities of stage action. The design should reflect the chaos, bloodshed, turbulence, and the tension between nations and races. The sanatorium, which is the complete opposite of it, is full of poetry, tolerance, and warmth as if it were a land of idyllic beauty. However, what the design should convey most is the darkness, conspiracy, and desperation, which makes people feel that there is nowhere to hide behind this poetic fairytale place. As I read, I tried to explore the

psychological aspects of the characters, the spirit of sacrifice, intellectual responsibility, and the extreme ways of dealing with trouble. It also satirizes the reality that people take advantage of each other. I think that the author also put a question mark on the relationship between the expansion of technological power and social morality.

The whole design itself was good training for me on how to express personal emotional landscape on the architecture to make it a strong gesture. The design used architectural features of the sanatorium as well as confinement room, worn texture, and colors to represent idyllic, protection, confinement, and surveillance.

Chapter 1: THE PRE-DESIGN PROCESS

Section 1 Research Images

The Physicist, written in 1961, naturally associates that time period with words such as war, nuclear, intension, and thus it's very important to take those factors into consideration while doing research. So in my research, in addition to many pictures of medical facilities, such as sanatorium and lunatic asylums, there are also many pictures of war and military facilities, which can capture the feelings belonging to the wartimes. These research images are the basis of the design, providing fundamental elements such as architecture, color, shape, emotion and texture. These elements are combined with individual thoughts to shape a unique scenic idea.



Figure 2



Figure 3



Figure 4



Figure 5



Figure 6



Figure 7



Figure 8



Figure 9



Figure 10



Figure 11



Figure 12



Figure 13



Figure 15

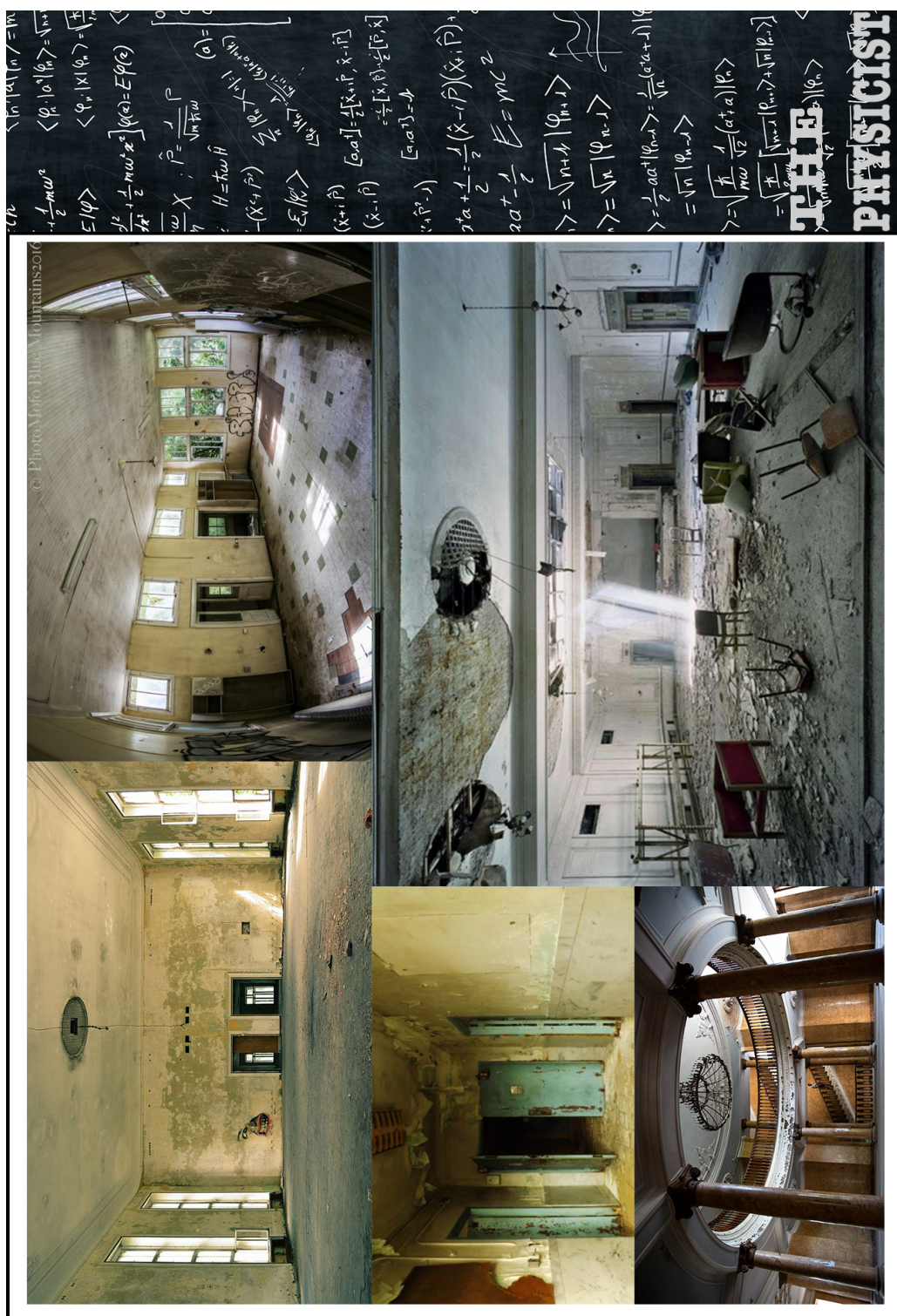
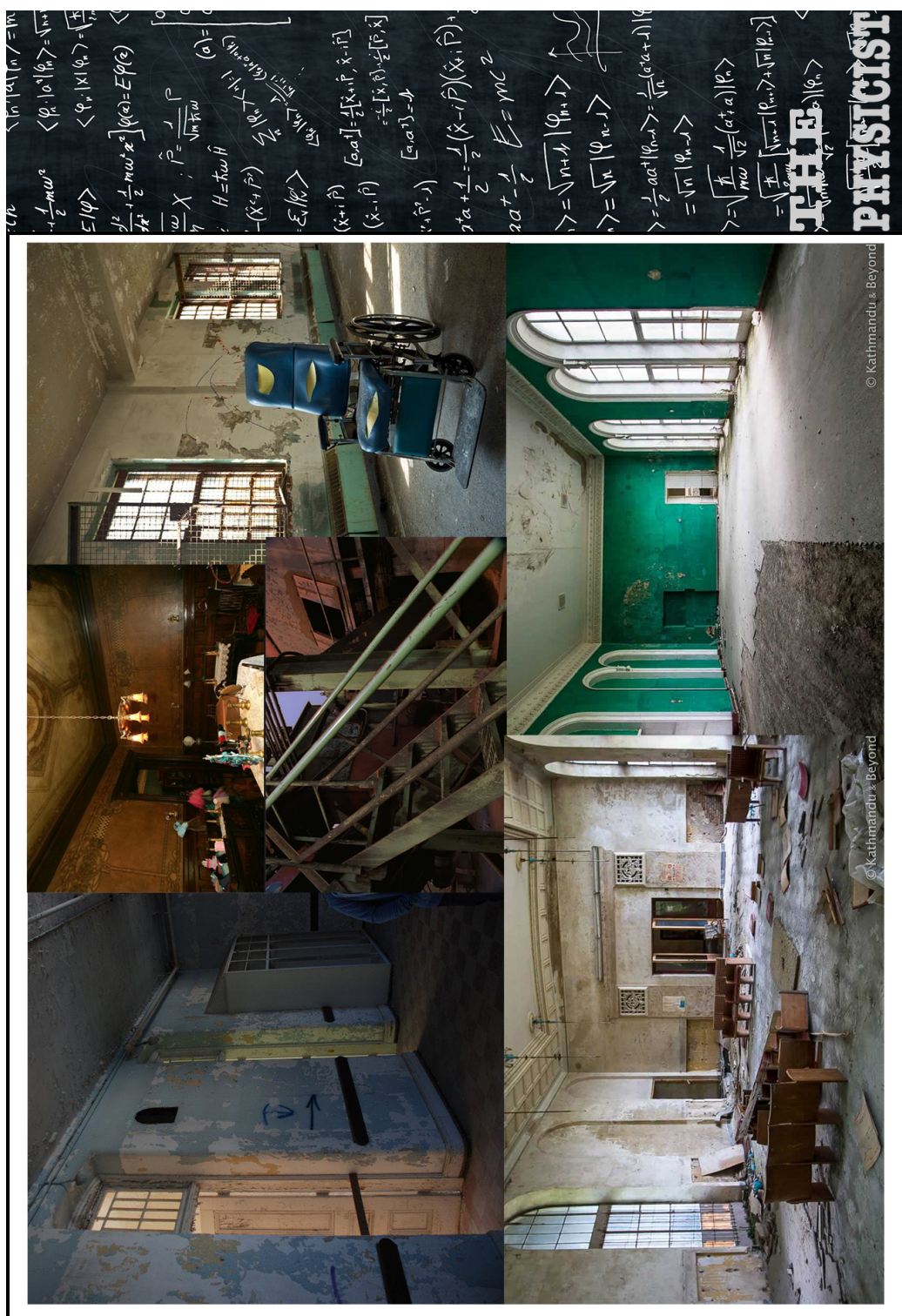
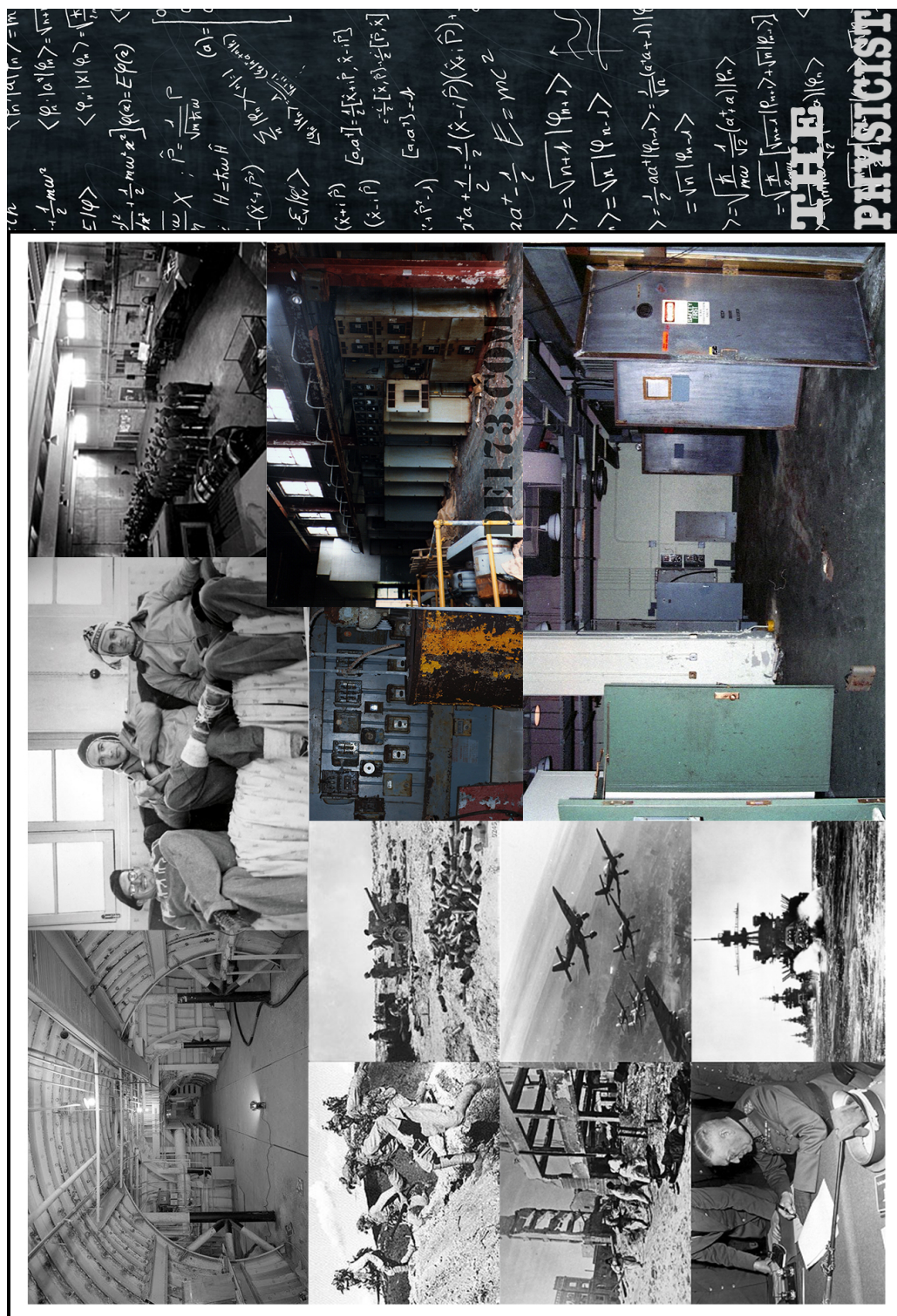


Figure 16





Section 2 Developing the Design

After I received a positive response from professor Daniel Conway for my research images, my next step was to integrate all of my research images and reassemble them in the form of collage (Figure 17). I chose the material from the images that I was interested in and reedited it in Photoshop with something that I thought would express the core of the script. What I really want to emphasize the warmth, cozy, poetic atmosphere compared with the external world. I was very much into the feeling of encirclement and protection brought by the curved lines. The messy, desaturated patterns on the outside encapsulate the feeling of turmoil and chaos of the world.

Next, I turned the initial impressions from collage into a more specific, bash model (Figure 18) for exploring more possibilities of design in dimensional space, and the subsequent conceptual sketch (Figure 19).

In the process of creation, I think the design focused heavily on “a sanatorium,” not “the sanatorium.” The design didn’t emotionally speak enough to tell the history of what happened here, as well as the feeling of the piece, imprisonment, the surveillance, the conspiracy. After chatting with my advisor, he encouraged me to retain, and even strengthen, the gesture I had created. Pay attention to the feeling that the design brings to people and express it in the most theatrical way. So I tried to develop my own story of design, and I defined this place as an “underground greenhouse.” I eliminated some of the ornate decorations, the wall was raised to increase the feeling of subterranean and placed the bottom of the window at the end

as if the building were still extending upwards. I celebrate more of the electrical wires and water pipes, not only to enhance the idea that this is an underground facility but also, to some extent, breaking up the original single curved surface through composing wires and pipes—the use of a spiral staircase as the sole entrance intended to accentuate the sense of imprisonment. The catwalk on the second floor borrows some elements from the prison’s corridor, providing more possibilities for the performance, meanwhile, solving the problem of the expansive wild space in the upper part of the set. In the middle of the building hangs a huge portrait of the owner of “prison” that contains both kindness and evil, suggesting that she is the king of this underground kingdom.

It's very important for me to focus on the core words: pastoral, inclusive, comfortable, and in essence, incarceration, surveillance, greed. How to project these abstract emotions onto the stage through lines, colors, materials, and other elements became the main work of the design.

As the design and ideas became solid, I tried to create a formal color-neutral model with a 1/4” scale to better display space, orientation, and size. After repeatedly testing various possibilities of proportion and dimension, I was finally finished by adding texture and color.





Figure 20



Figure 21

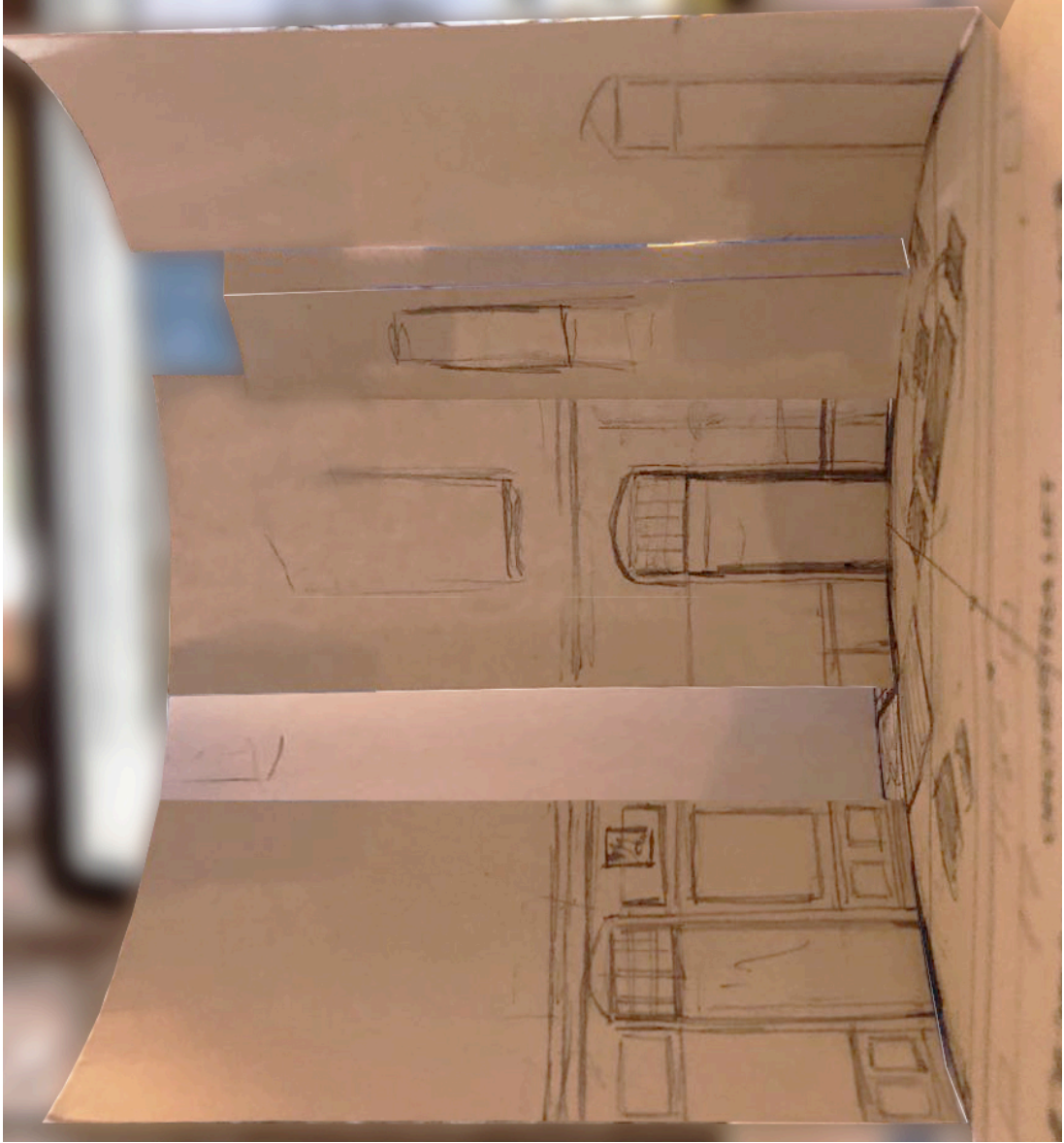


Figure 22



Figure 23



Figure 24



Figure 25



Figure 26

Chapter 2: THE PRODUCTION PROCESS

Section 1 The Drafting

After my advisor responding positively to the design, my next step was to create technical drafting using Vectorworks. The drafting packet (Figure 22 to 30) conveyed the materials, dimensions, details, and ground plan so that scenic shop could build the show.

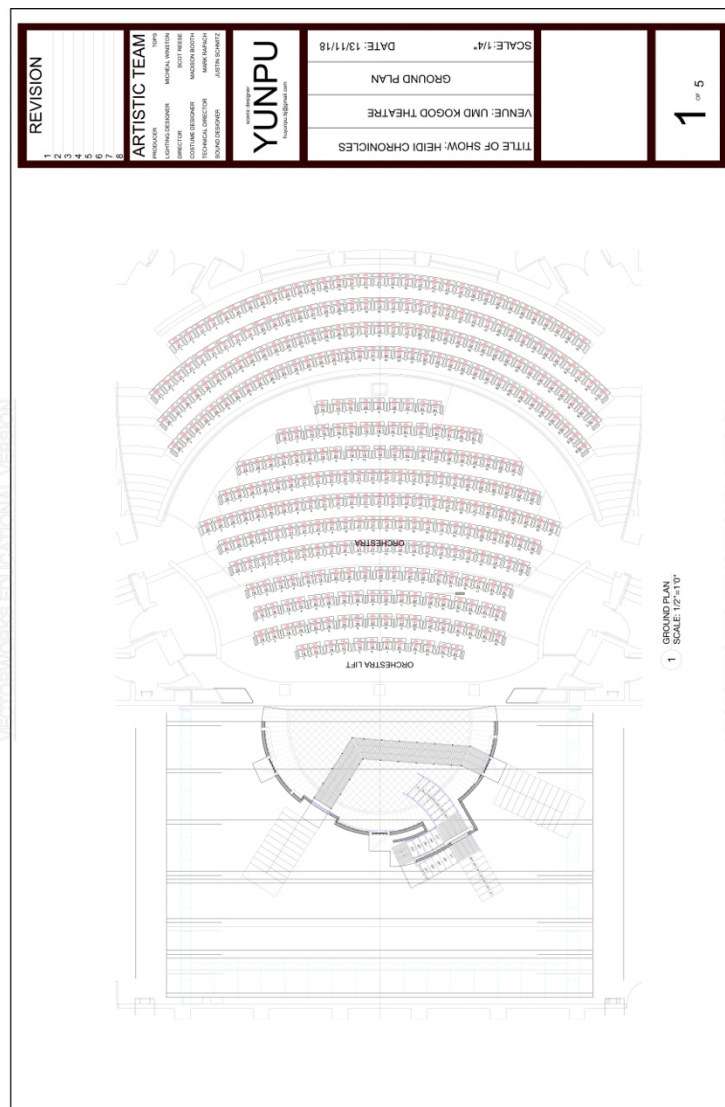


Figure 27

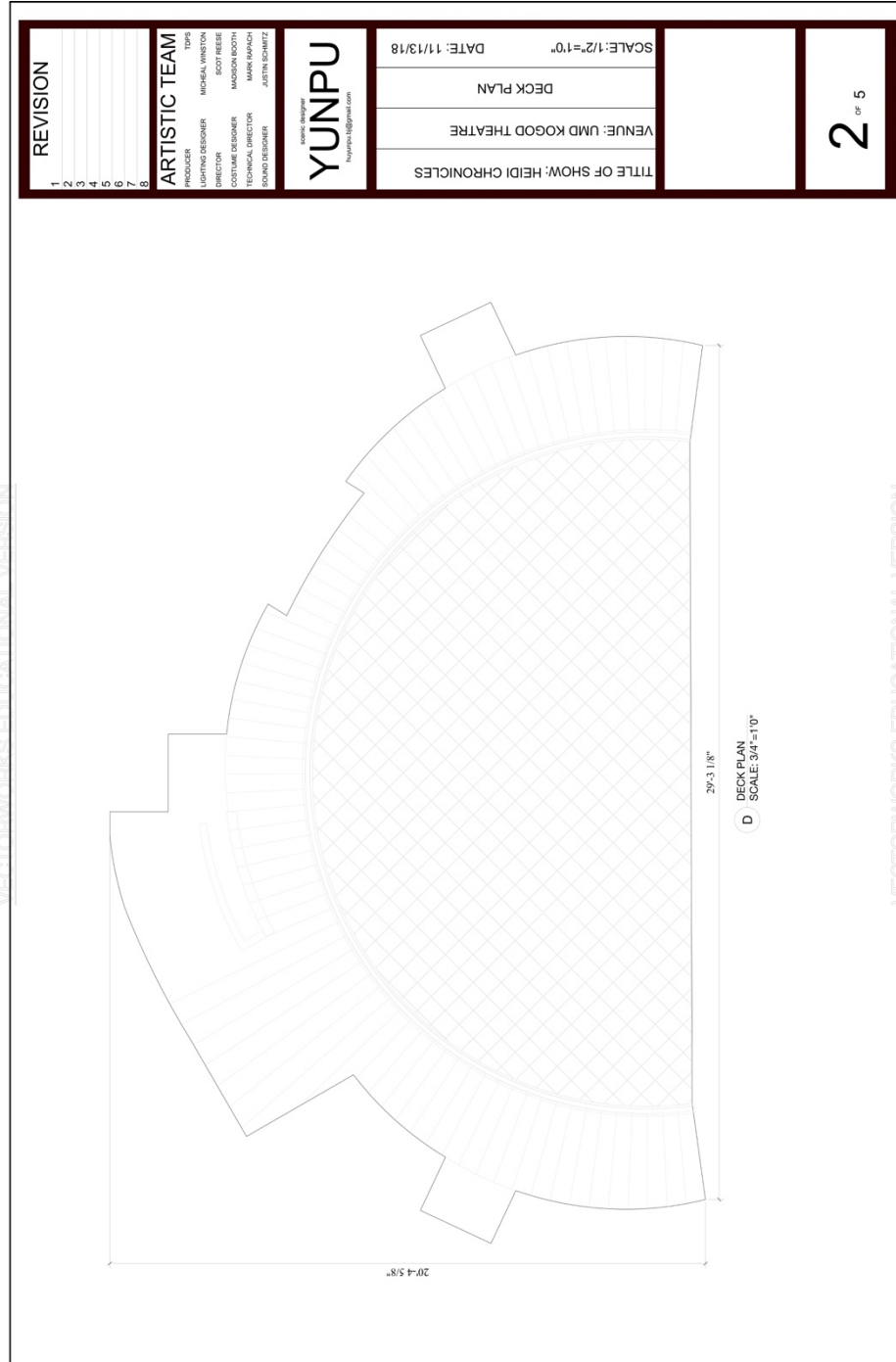
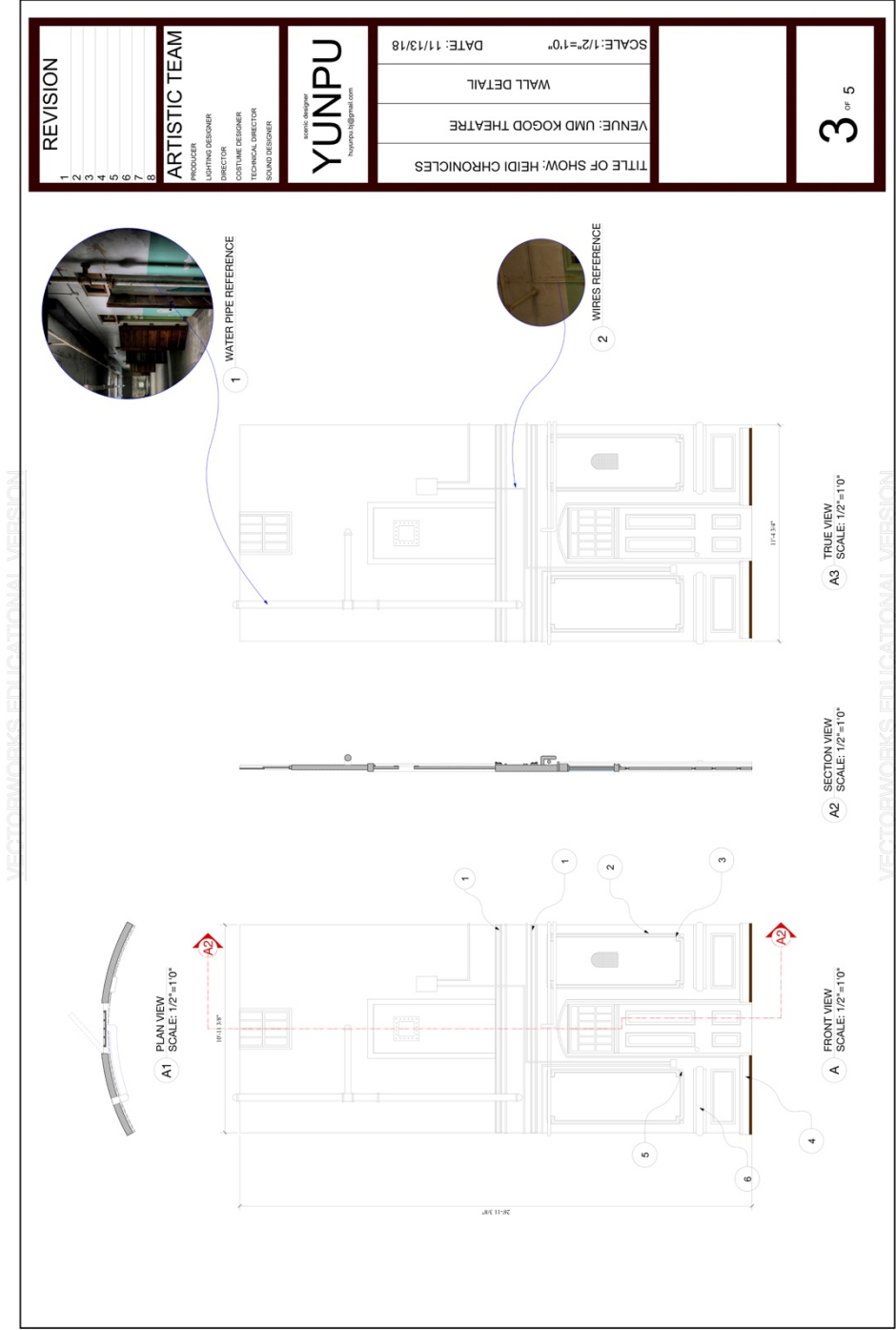


Figure 28



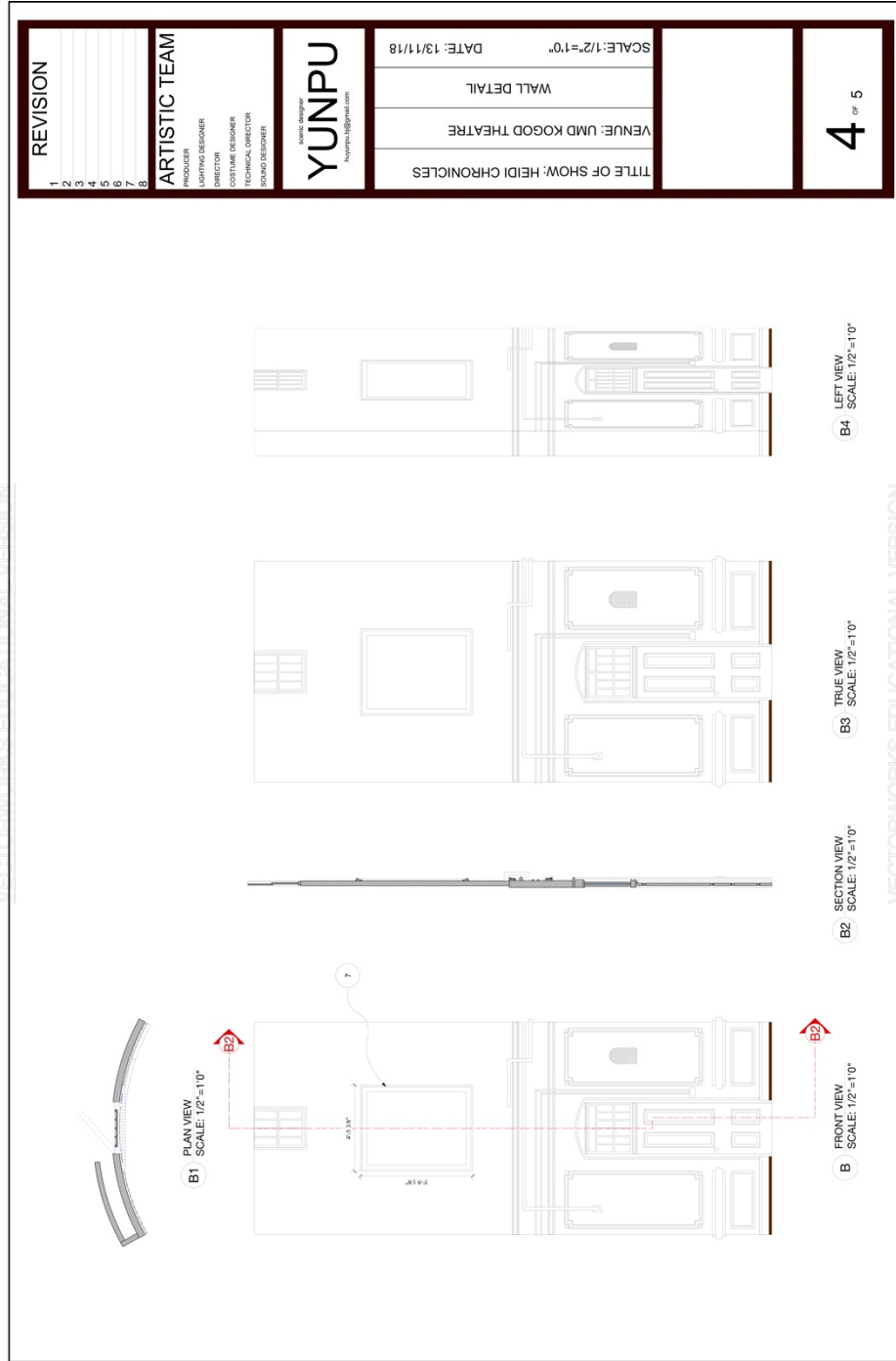
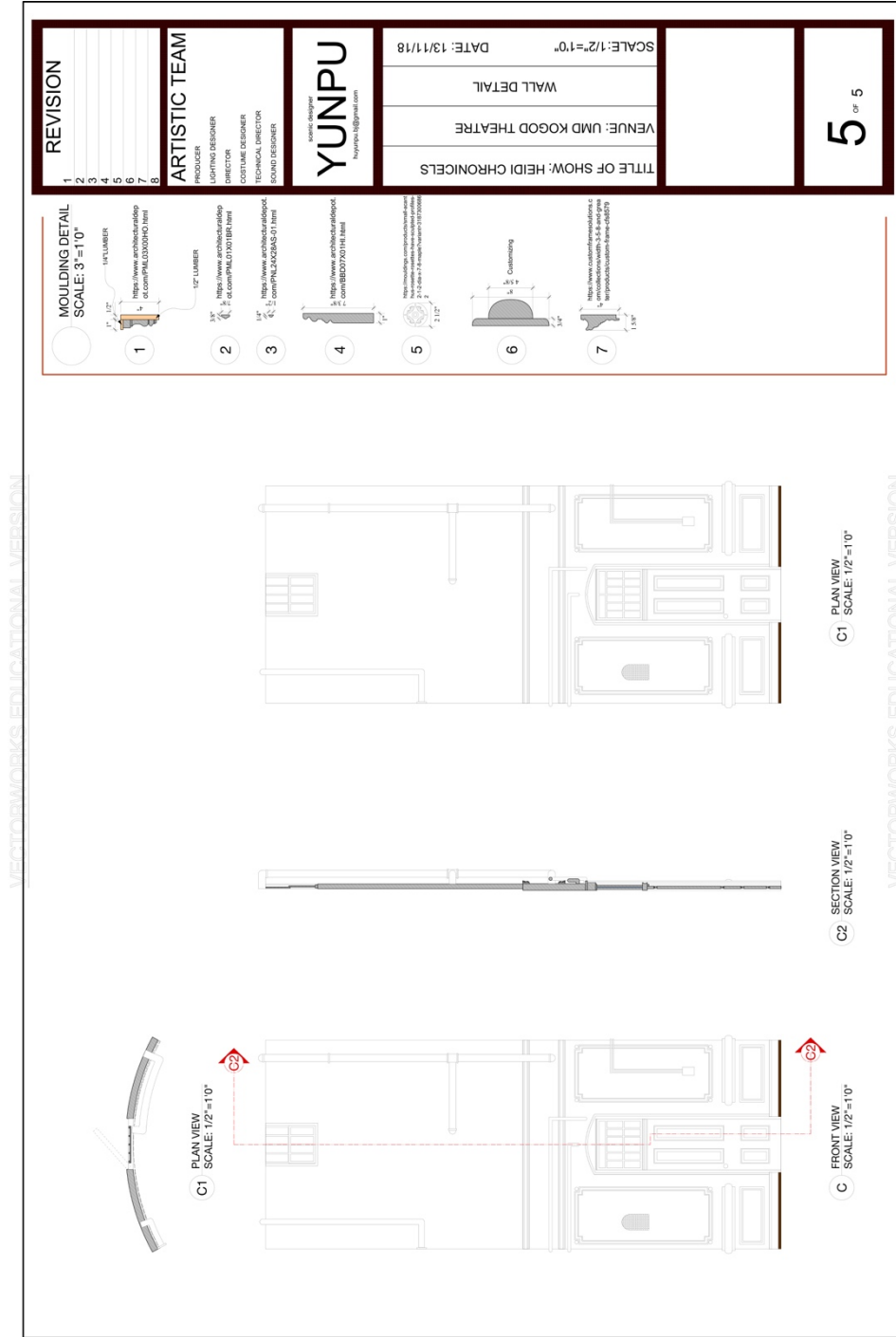


Figure 30



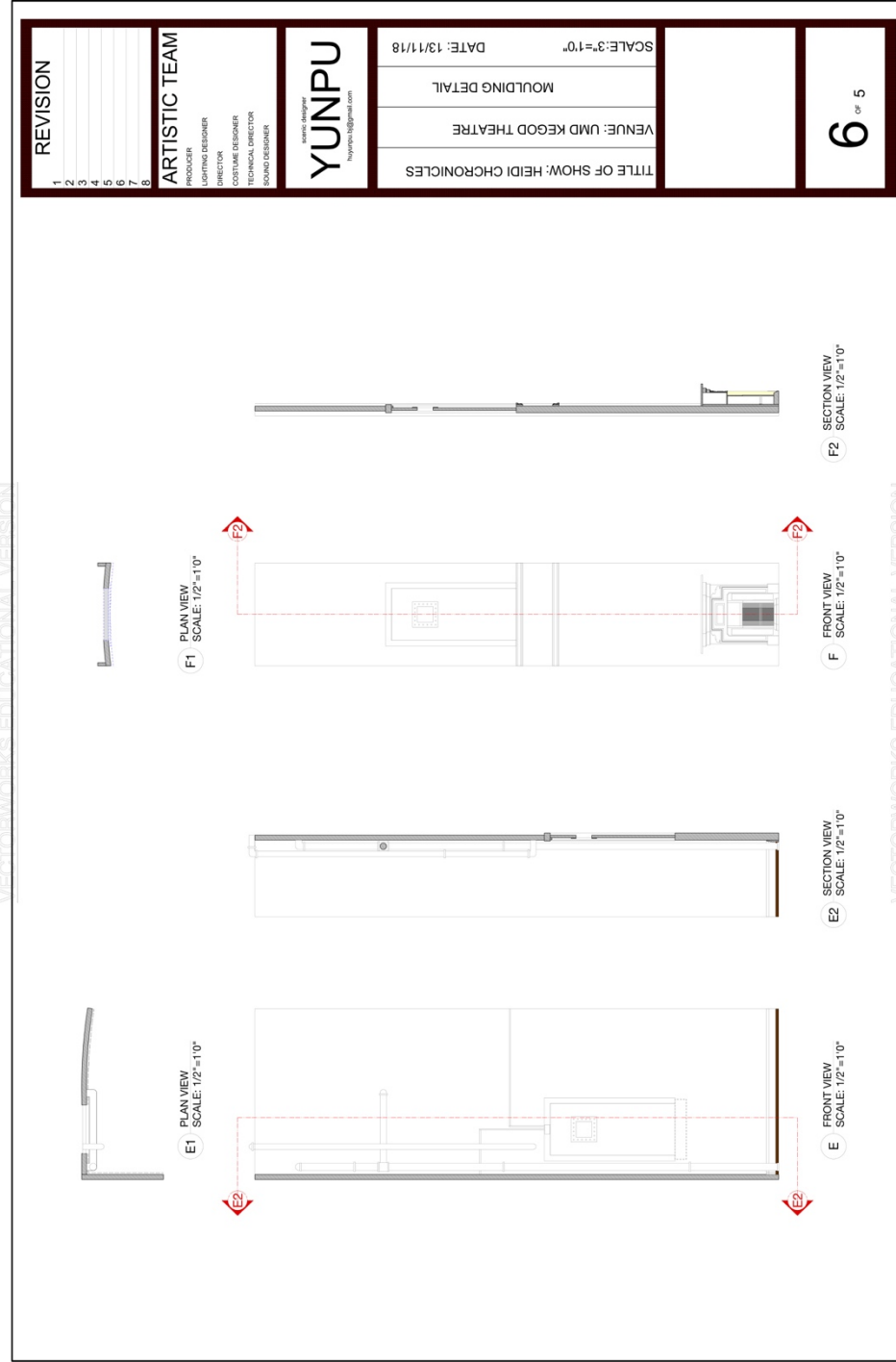


Figure 32



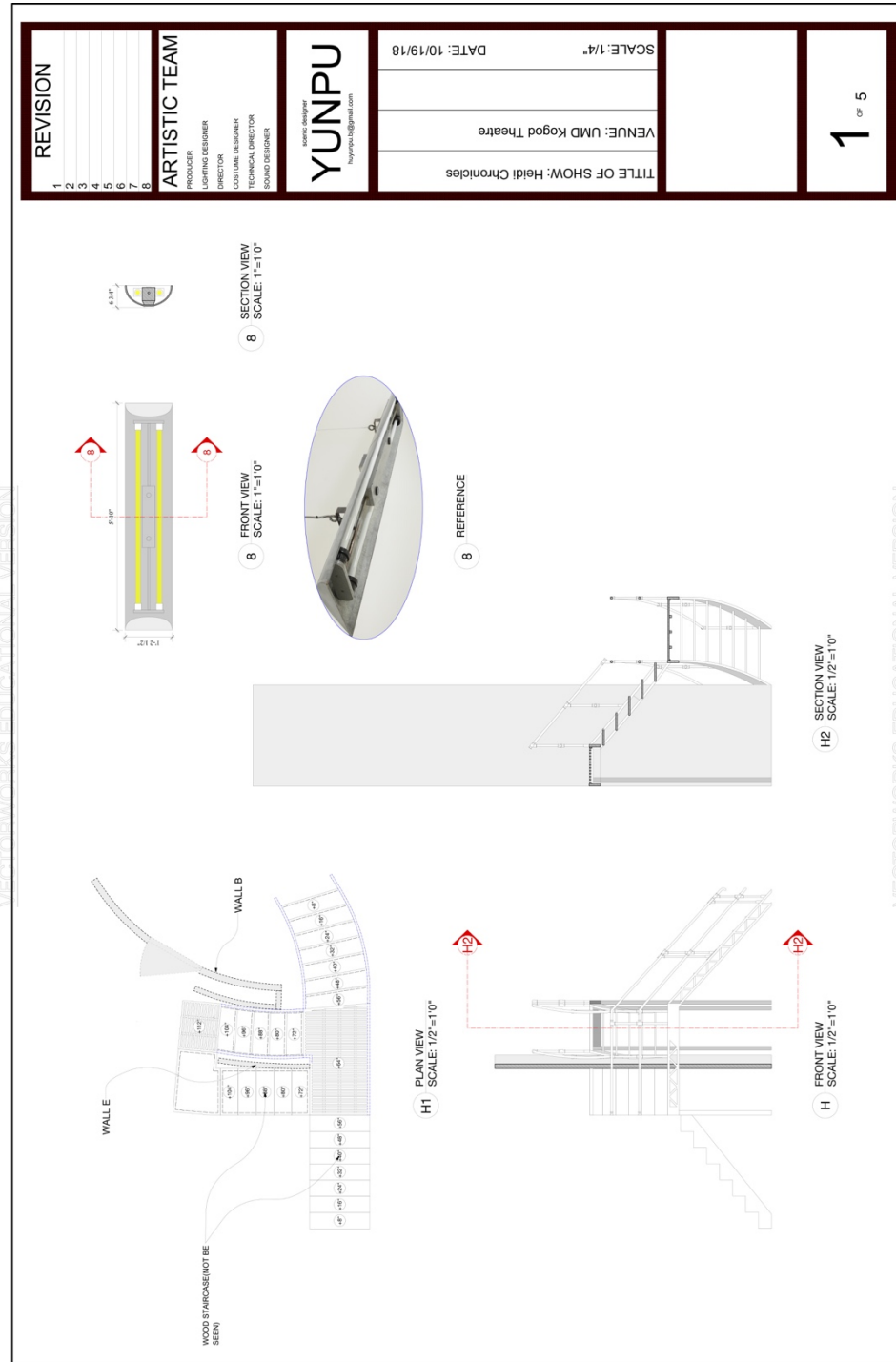


Figure 34

Section 2 Painter's Elevations

Painter's Elevations (Figure 30 to 33) convey texture, color to the scenic paint shop.

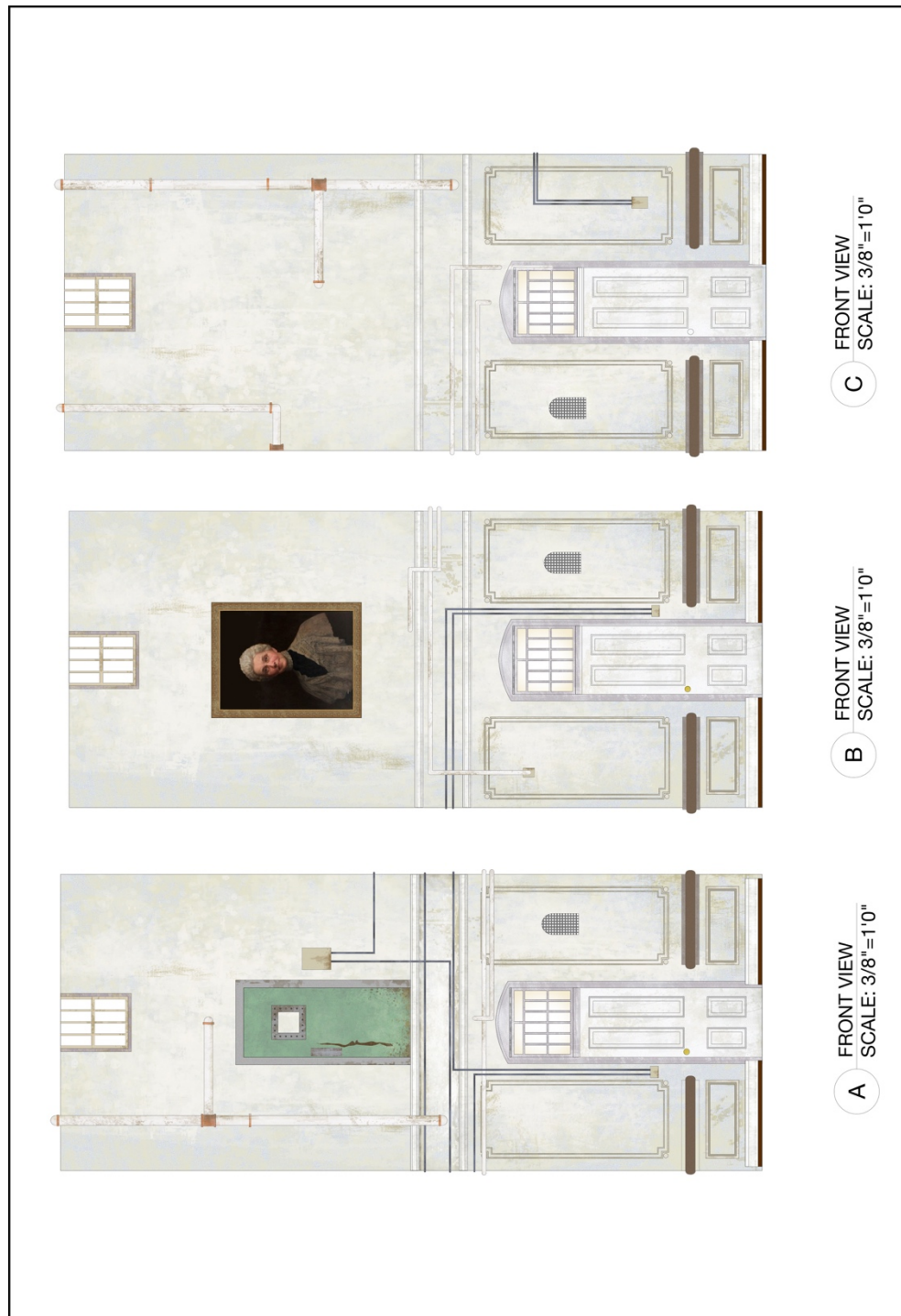


Figure 35

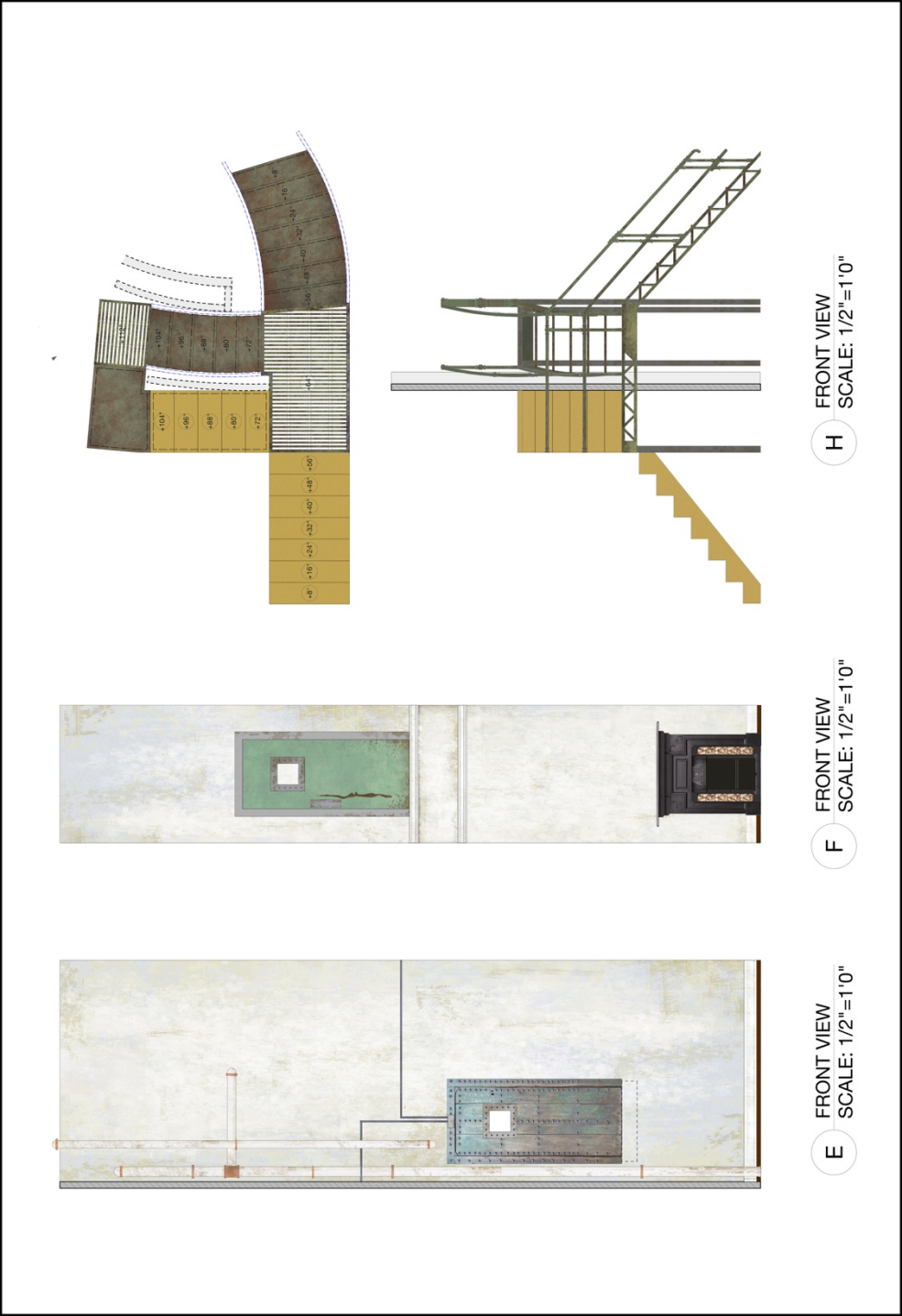


Figure 36

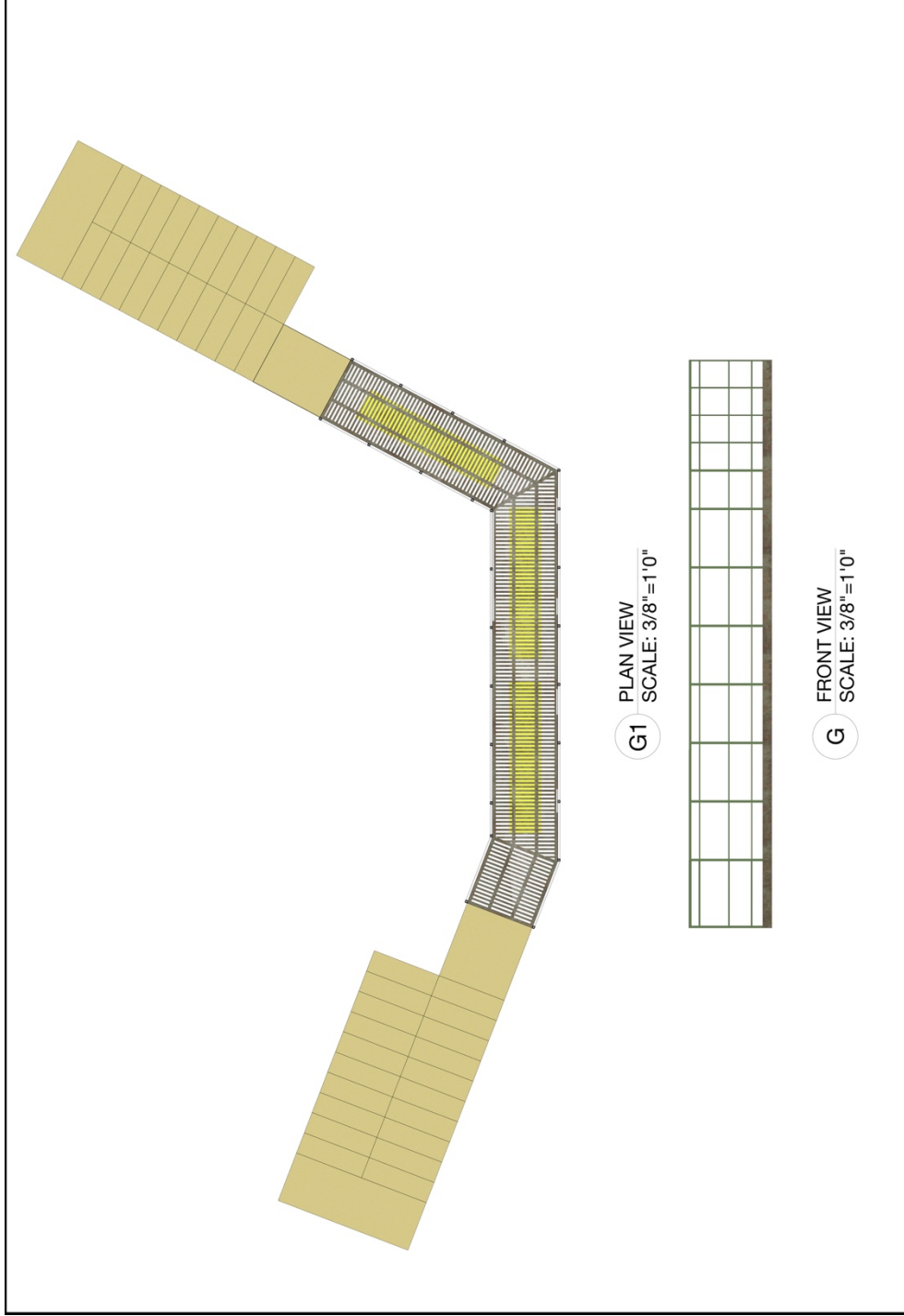


Figure 37

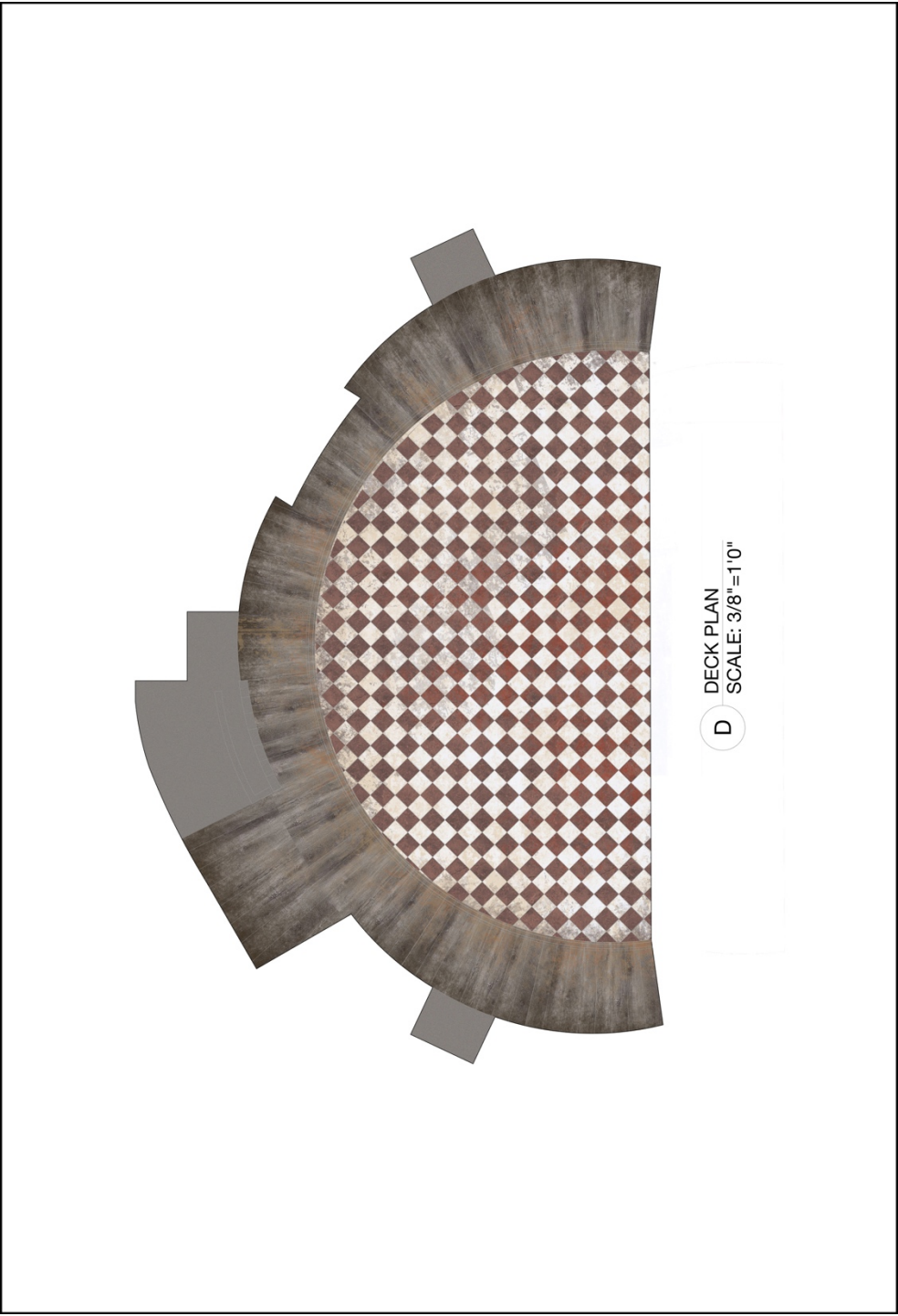


Figure 38

Section 3 The Properties Book

The Properties Book (Figure 34 to 45) includes images and descriptions of furniture, hand props, and consumables staff that actor may use in the show.



Figure 39

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3. SET OF DINNING TABLE AND CHAIRS (Q:4)

A DINNING TABLE WITH FOUR DINNING CHAIR



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4. ROCKING CHAIRS (Q:1)



Figure 40

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5. SMALL TABLE (Q:1)

SMALL TABLE PUT IN FRONT OF SOFA, 2' WIDE



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6. FLUORESCENT LAMP (Q:4)

VINTAGE STYLE OF FLUORESCENT LAMP INSTALL UNDER THE CATWALK



Figure 41

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7. REVOLVING PISTOL (Q:3)



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8. CAMERA (Q:1)

VINTAGE STYLE CAMERA, TAKING PHOTO DURING
THE SHOW, FLASH AND SHUTTER SOUND ARE
PREFERRED



Figure 42

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9. VIOLIN (Q:1)



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10. CANDLE HOLDING (Q:2)

18" TALL COFFEE TABLE WITH 36" BY 20" TOP



Figure 43

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11. TEA SET (Q:1)



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12. CIGAR (Q:6)



Figure 44

13. CIGARETTE (Q:6)



14. KNIFES AND FORKS (Q:1)



Figure 45

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15. SMALL RING BELL(Q:1)



16. MUSIC SCORE(Q:1)

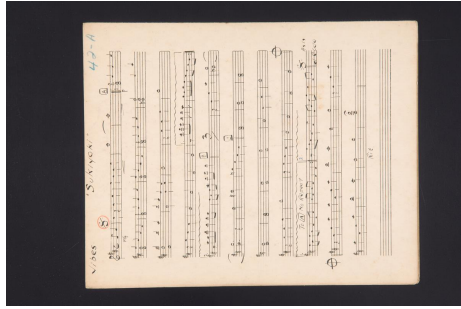


Figure 46

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17. BOX OF CHALK (Q:1)

BOX OF WHITE CHALK THAT ACTOR COULD DRAW
DURING THE SHOW



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18. A STACK OF HOSPITAL RECORD(Q:1)

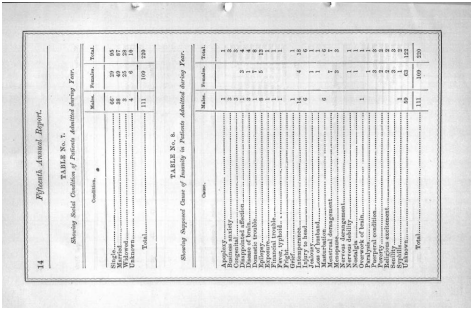


Figure 47

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19. BRANDY(Q:1)

ALCOHOL AND GLASS FOR ACTOR
TO DRINK



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20. Wine and Glasses(Q:1)



Figure 48

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21. WINE(Q:1)



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22. DINNER SERVICE(Q:1)



Figure 49

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23. VASES(Q:2)

TWO VASES WITH SOME FAKE
FLOWER IN IT



Figure 50

Chapter 3: REFLECTION

In the end, I think the whole design process is very successful and creative. I created a unique sculpture of sanatorium for *The Physicists*. The design provides the theatrical environment into which the actors can truly integrate.

It is a pity that I do not have the opportunity to exchange ideas with directors and other designers and to explore more possibilities. I believe that sharing ideas with other members can push the design to another level.

If I have the opportunity to cooperate with the director to work on *The Physicists* together in the future, I'm quite looking forward to researching how the director's ideas will inspire me and shape the design in a more successful way.

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